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SUBJECT: USG DELEGATION APPROACHES BELGIUM ON TERRORISM  
THREAT

REF: BRUSSELS 3292

Classified By: POLCOUNS TED ANDREWS. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: An inter-agency USG team, led by S/CT Counterterrorism Coordinator Dell Dailey, met with representatives of Belgium's counterterrorism, law enforcement, and intelligence communities, as well as parliamentarians, to discuss Al Qaida's increasing threat to Europe and the West, and ways to reinforce bilateral cooperation against terrorism. The meetings were another step in an ongoing U.S.-Belgian dialogue designed to explore ways to combat terrorist activities in Belgium, including through intelligence exchange, prosecutions, diplomatic initiatives, and steps against terrorist financing. The Belgians were interested in the information on Al Qaida's growing global presence and reacted positively to the idea of increased bilateral cooperation on terrorism issues. They were optimistic about the progress of the trial of Bilal Souhbir and five others suspected of planning suicide attacks in Iraq. The prosecution hopes to net stiff sentences for Souhbir and his cohorts under Belgium's antiterrorism law, which MFA Counterterrorism Adviser Andre Ceulemans cited as a major avenue for fighting terrorism in Belgium. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S/NF) S/CT Counterterrorism Coordinator Dell Dailey, Treasury Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing Patrick O'Brien, NSC Director for European Counterterrorism Elizabeth Farr, NCTC Deputy Director for Information Sharing Russell Travers, FBI Deputy Assistant Director for Counterterrorism Issues Charles Frahm, Justice Department Counsel to the Deputy Attorney General Jessie Liu, and DHS Attache Jacquelyn Bednarz, accompanied by Ambassador Fox and embassy staff, met with their Belgian counterparts November 7. Representatives from Belgium's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Interior, Justice Ministry, State Security Service (Surete), Office for Threat Analysis (OCAM/OCAD), Federal Prosecutor's Office, Federal Police, National Crisis Center, and Financial Intelligence Processing Unit (CTIF) participated, with the MFA's Secretary General Jan Grauls, OCAM's Deputy Director Luc Verheyden, and Justice's Pascale Vandernacht, Deputy Chief of Cabinet for Counterterrorism Issues, chairing the various meetings. The USG team briefed the Belgians on the growing threat Al Qaida poses to the West and both sides discussed ways the U.S. and Belgium can further cooperation and coordination on antiterrorism matters. Embassy staff and Ambassador Fox met with the USG team prior to their meetings with the Belgians to discuss Belgian thinking on bilateral cooperation and consider the most promising approach to use with the GoB.

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Increased Al Qaida Threat  
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¶3. (S/NF) Ambassador Dailey, aided by NCTC Travers' presentation on the Al Qaida threat, laid out USG thinking to

the Belgians. He said the United States is trying to engage European partners on Al Qaida's increasing strategic reach throughout Europe, aided by a more permissive environment in the FATA, improved communication techniques, and the merger that resulted in AQIM. All of these factors combined to increase the potential for Al Qaida to use its terrorist infrastructure within Europe to rally attacks in Europe or into the United States through Europe. While no specific information on timing or targets existed, information pointed to the West as a target for future Al Qaida attacks. The U.S. goal, spearheaded by President Bush's concern about the increased threat, was to inform allies and disrupt threatening activity before it occurs in the U.S.

¶4. (S/NF) Dailey highlighted the importance of U.S.-Belgian cooperation to fight the threat to the West, and urged the Belgian law enforcement and intelligence services to inform the U.S. about any threads of information or activity that crossed their path. Treasury's O'Brien praised CTIF and stressed the value of evaluating financial information as a tool against terrorism. MFA Counterterrorism Adviser Ceulemans indicated that Belgium had established the authority in 2007 to freeze assets and to create a national list of terrorist entities involved in terrorist financing. He said OCAM would have significant input into formulating names for the national list.

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Belgian Prosecution of Suspected Terrorists  
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¶5. (S/NF) The USG team praised the Belgians for bringing Souhbir and his cohorts to trial, as well as for prosecuting other suspected terrorists under Belgium's 2003 antiterrorism law. Justice's Liu said the U.S. is watching the Souhbir

trial closely, especially from the angle of terrorists being radicalized at home and then committing terrorist attacks abroad (Belgian Muriel Degauque and her husband allegedly trained within Souhbir's cell for suicide attacks in Iraq). MFA Secretary General Grauls mentioned Belgium's Federal Plan Against Radicalization. Ceulemans said a national anti-radicalization program had been launched in April 2007, with OCAM playing a major role in implementing the plan. The program operated on a federal level, but hoped to expand to the communities, where a dialogue between moderates and radicals was deemed essential. Ceulemans indicated the Prime Minister's Office of Intelligence and Security was reviewing ways to combat radicalization in mosques, prisons, and via the internet and the media. Ceulemans called combating radicalization a "priority area" for Belgium, which was considering ways to address the issue within the UN and EU.

¶6. (S/NF) Grauls said it had "shocked" Belgian society that a Belgian woman such as Degauque could have been involved in suicide attacks. The case had raised public awareness of the threat within Belgium's borders and sent a message to the political as well as public sectors of Belgian society about the "homegrown threat." Grauls said such cases contributed to the passage of stronger antiterrorism legislation, such as the 2003 antiterrorism law. Dailey encouraged Belgium to reconsider legislation regarding special investigative techniques that would give broader wiretapping authority to intelligence officials to investigate and build cases against terror suspects. Grauls said the proposed legislation, which was not passed in April, was the victim of June federal elections and had to await the establishment of a new government for passage.

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Belgian Efforts Positive, Continued Vigilance Needed  
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¶7. (S/NF) Bednarz praised Belgian support for the Container Security Initiative (CSI) in Antwerp and the additional security features in Belgian passports. She pointed to the exchange of PNR information as a useful tool in targeting potential terrorists and said the U.S. wanted to work with

Belgium in demonstrating uses for the information. Bednarz also discussed biometrics as a screening tool for asylum applicants, whereby a "blind exchange" of fingerprints could help identify potential threats. Grauls was interested in this program, although he noted that the exchange of PNR information was "a difficult process." He agreed that the CSI initiative was "working well," and welcomed an invitation for Belgians to visit the U.S. and meet with various counterterrorism agencies.

¶8. (S/NF) Dailey stressed the positives in Belgian counterterrorism efforts, noting the passage of the stricter 2003 antiterrorism law, the creation of OCAM, the establishment of a counterterrorism adviser in the MFA, the increased budget for counterterrorism activities and intelligence gathering, and Belgium's troop presence in Afghanistan. He urged the Belgians, however, to closely review potential terrorism indicators, because Belgium, as the headquarters of the EU and NATO, might be a target. He pointed to attacks on the U.S. and its facilities as cases of missed indicators and urged Belgium not to make the same mistake.

¶9. (S/NF) Grauls agreed that Belgium, as the headquarters of the EU, could face an attack. He said Belgian authorities were very aware of the possibility and pointed to the positives noted by Dailey as ongoing efforts by Belgium to remain vigilant. Grauls indicated that Belgium was "satisfied with the cooperative framework established with the U.S." on counterterrorism matters.

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Turkey and the PKK  
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¶10. (S/NF) Dailey raised the struggle between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Iraq. He reiterated U.S. support for Turkey and indicated U.S. success in getting Iraqi authorities to crackdown on the PKK. It was a positive sign that Iraqi authorities had acknowledged the PKK threat. He asked for Belgian support for Turkey. Grauls reiterated Belgium's ongoing complaint: that Turkey needed to provide better, more specific information to enable Belgian authorities to go after PKK members in Belgium. He asked for U.S. assistance with Turkey: "help us to help them."

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Delisting Global Relief Fund members  
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¶11. (S/NF) Grauls also asked for feedback on Belgium's request to delist former Global Relief Fund members Nabil Sayadi and Patricia Vinck. (The GOB requested that Sayadi and Vinck be removed from the UN Sanctions list after a Belgian court ruled in 2005 that there was insufficient evidence to pursue a court case for money laundering. A Belgian Appeals Court upheld the lower court ruling.) Grauls requested the U.S. either provide more information for Belgium to resume a court case against Sayadi and Vinck or support delisting. O'Brien indicated Treasury would follow up on the case, noting that the U.S. would not support UN delisting if Sayadi and Vinck remained on the U.S. list. Frahm said the FBI would also look into the case to see what additional information could be provided either in support of continued listing or a review and delisting.

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Belgian Police/Prosecutors Comment on Threat  
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¶12. (S/NF) During a meeting hosted by OCAM's Luc Verheyden, which featured representatives from Belgium's Federal Police and Prosecutor offices, as well as the Interior Ministry, intelligence services, and terrorist financing unit, the Belgians said they actively monitored suspected terrorist cells. They perceived the terrorist threat to Belgium as "average," but said Belgium's antiterrorism services were continually vigilant, despite a public that was "not always

directly concerned" about terrorism within its borders, absent obvious terrorist activity. For example, Ann Fransen, chief of the antiterrorism unit in the Federal Prosecutor's Office, noted that, after day one, public interest in the Souhvir trial had died down. Verheyden said Belgian authorities did not actively seek to change the public perception, out of concern for increasing fear and distrust of foreigners.

¶13. (S/NF) Verheyden said there was a concern about "home grown radicals" and pointed to the London bombings. He said Belgium's antiradicalization plan ("Plan R") was considered vital to combating this trend, and cited several factors contributing to radicalization, including the internet, lack of integration into Western society, and unemployment. He said jihadists were also returning to Europe to recruit new members. As part of "Plan R," Belgian authorities routinely monitored the internet and moved imprisoned radicals around to combat recruitment efforts.

¶14. (S/NF) Belgium had also recently introduced an action plan to combat terrorist financing, and a training session for counterterrorism and police officials was scheduled soon to address internet recruitment (USG participation was requested). The Belgians stressed that communication was good among their various counterterrorism units, and stressed their desire for good intelligence from the U.S. and continued strong bilateral cooperation. U.S. Treasury representative O'Brien urged the Belgians to also consider monitoring cash couriers more closely, citing the need for cash limits across borders and stricter declaration requirements. He also urged that charities be monitored more closely, through audits and a strict supervisory framework.

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Justice Ministry Vows to Improve Efforts  
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¶15. (S/NF) The theme of continued vigilance and bilateral cooperation was echoed by Justice Minister Onkelinx's Deputy Chief of Cabinet, Pascale Vandernacht. He praised the quality of bilateral cooperation, indicating Belgium was open to improvements, and said Belgium took potential terrorism threats very seriously: "you can count on us to develop and improve our efforts." Vandernacht stressed "the baton would be passed on" once a new Justice Minister was in place, adding that Belgium wanted continuity in promoting new legislation and prosecuting terror cases. According to Vandernacht, there had been "a real effort in the past year that we anticipate continuing." U.S. Justice Department official Liu offered USG dialogue on drafting antiterrorism legislation.

¶16. (S/NF) Ambassador Dailey summed up the challenge for Belgium as one of privacy balanced against security. The U.S. has the same concern, managing to implement security measures while maintaining democratic principles. He urged the Belgians to benefit from the U.S. experience and heed early indicators about potential threats. The fact that Belgium's neighbors had suffered attacks increased the threat to Belgium. Domestic vigilance and information sharing with the U.S. were crucial. He also encouraged Belgium to consider further legislative action to strengthen the tools available for investigating terrorist suspects.

¶17. (U) S/CT Counterterrorism Coordinator Dailey approved this message.

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